DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 232 467 FL 013 842

AUTHOR McConochie, Jean
TITLE Shopping for Community Contacts.
PUB DATE 71
NOTE 10p.
PUB TYPE Journal Articles (080) -- Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
JOURNAL CIT International Educational and Cultural Exchange; v7 n2 Fall 1971

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adults; Cultural Education; Culture Contact; *English (Second Language); Language Teachers; *Learning Activities; *Speech Communication

ABSTRACT

The use of errand assignments as a means of encouraging language use outside the language classroom is described. The errand assignments were developed for the Japanese Teachers Program, in which Japanese teachers of English visited the United States for language practice. Participants were asked to go to such places as florists, furniture stores, jewelers, drug stores, barbers, and police stations to perform such errands as purchasing items, finding out prices, and inquiring about local laws. Each errand assignment was given to two people, one of whom acted as the performer while the other served as the reporter. The assignments combined a structured activity with the opportunity for interaction with members of the host culture. (RW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Jean McConochie

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ED232467

FL013842

Shopping for Community Contacts

Jean McConochie

Since 1967, more than 3,000 Japanese teachers of English have participated in summer programs in the U.S. under the auspices of the Council on International Educational Exchange. A number of these university-based programs have used the "errand assignment" in one form or another. This description of summer activities from a decade ago is offered as a reminder of the pleasures such a program brings, for historical interest, and as an idea for anyone who is planning ahead for the summer of 1981. It's another Lesson That Works. The following article is reprinted by permission from International Educational and Cultural Exchange, *VII:2 (Fall 1971).*

Introducing foreign visitors, or new residents, to varied aspects of American life is a normal component of English language programs in the United States. It is sometimes difficult, however, to devise ways in which students may be led to make their own discoveries, rather than simply accept the word of a teacher. Another program goal which may also be difficult to achieve is to have students use the language they are learning in relatively unstructured situations outside the classroom.

Both of these goals are part of the Japanese Teachers Program (JTP) sponsored by the Council on International Educational change. Since 1968, the Council has offered an eight-week

summer program through which a Japanese teacher may come to the United States for four weeks of intensive language study on a university campus, followed by travel and an extended homestay with an American family.

The teachers come, as they say, "to brush up" their English. In effect, this means that they want to meet and talk with as many Americans as possible, for in Japan they find few opportunities to use English outside the classroom. Their instructors are equally interested in having the Japanese move beyond the safety of classroom English to less structured "real" language and in having them see more of American life than that represented by the academic community. These interests converge happily in the "errand."

Origin of the Errand

The idea originated with Dr. Virginia French Allen, who suggested it at a JTP planning session in 1969.[1] Gary Gabriel, director of the JTP at Rutgers University that summer, elaborated the framework, developing the "errand assignment," as it came to be known. Staff members, of whom I was one, collaborated in inventing the errand topics and editing the final reports for duplicating.[2] The following summer the errand assignment was used in two Japanese Teachers Programs—one at Fordham University, directed by Mr. Gabriel, and one held in Moorestown, New Jersey, under the sponsorship of Temple University, co-directed by Dr. Allen and Dr. Donald S. Knapp.

Twenty-one errands were devised for the 42 participants in the Rutgers program. The assignments were given to teams of two—an interviewer and a reporter. In each case the more passive member of the team was assigned the more active role. Although allowed to ask the reporter for help during the interview if that became necessary, the interviewer was responsible for doing all the talking required by the assignment.

The reporter was responsible for taking notes and turning in a written report. The format for these reports was left unspecified beyond the requirement that the Japanese teachers indicate when and where they went and that they describe what happened. Assigned at the end of the first week, the reports were due in

written form by the final class meeting; however, teams gave oral reports on their errands as they were completed, since the program participants were eager to share their adventures.

Two "old boys" at the florist's

The more fluent teams were given the more complicated errands, and vice versa—as the teachers themselves realized in at least one case. Two of the older men in the Rutgers program were given the task of going to a local florist to find out what flowers are most popular in the United States, what special meaning different varieties of flowers have, and how much flowers cost. Mr. Watanabe reported on the questions posed and then added,

> Mr. Gabriel was kind enough to offer an easy errand of going to a florist's to us two old boys who are not good at English conversation, but in fact this errand was not so easy for us.

He explained that neither he nor Mr. Tanaka had been interested in flowers in Japan and that neither knew the Japanese names of any flowers except cherry blossoms and chrysanthemums. "But anyway," he concluded—with typical Japanese grace—"we are very glad to have done our duty and acquired some knowledge of flowers."

Going into a florist's to ask questions rather than to make a purchase obviously required that the teachers explain their assignment. This was also the case in several other errands. For example, Mr. Suzuki (No. 1 of the three Suzuki's in the program) was allowed to identify the team's mission when he and Mr. Toda went to a local stockbroker with a hypothetical $1,000 to invest.

> When we entered the office, we found several clerks, some of them watching the tickertape and others working with the phone in their hands at the desk, which looks like a booth in a language lab. Then we told a young lady at the information desk of our intention and she introduced Mr. Marger, a tall, kind man, to us.

The salesman gave them a list of recommended stocks and "wiregrams" giving figures on individual issues.

> For interest we selected Niagara Mohawk Power out of the list, considering the safety and pursuit of profits. For speculation, we chose Union Oil of California, because a wiregram said that the firm had drilled two wells in Alaska and they are expected to bring about a great profit. We told him of our selections and asked for his opinion.

He said we have an expert's eye right at the beginning and recommended both of them with confidence.

The men "purchased" 26 shares of NMP at 17⅞ and 10 shares of UOC at 51⅛. (Union Oil is up a few points at the moment; Niagara Mohawk hovers between 16 and 18. So much for expert eyes.)

Furnishing a living room

Another pair were asked to find out the cost of furnishing a Western-style living room. When a furniture store owner expressed surprise at their errand, Mr. Yoshida told him, "with a proud look," to quote the reporter, "that it is a most unique way of learning English created by our honorable instructor, Mr. Gabriel." The teachers' pride in their accomplishment was matched by their pleasure in the imaginative task, made vivid by Mr. Murata's use of the historical present.

Next we go into a pottery store, because we want to have a clock in our living room. . . . We think we want to add a TV set in our room, too, so we decide to buy one. In this store, however, we can't find any TV sets except those made in Japan. Besides, the prices of them are all the same—$99.95. Anyway, we buy one.

When we walk along the street, we find a fruit garland and buy one. We think it is good for the decoration of the room. The most expensive prices for the living room furniture total $4,887.95, and the cheapest, $597.75.

Diamond rings

A final example of an errand that required self-identification is "The Engagement Ring." Mr. Tsuchiya and Mr. Tashiro, both in their 30's and married, drew the assignment of pricing engagement rings and finding out how the cost was determined. Two clerks in a New Brunswick jewelry store graciously showed them many rings and explained the factors of carat, cut, color, and clarity. Mr. Tsuchiya, a born story-teller as it happens, concluded by giving us a rare glimpse of his inner thoughts:

On our way out of the shop, we decided to choose a diamond ring priced at $675 as an engagement ring. The bright summer sun blinded us. I thought to myself, "If only I were 10 years younger!"

5

Remedy for a sore throat

For other errands, the Japanese teachers were specifically

instructed *not* to say that they were on an assignment for a class. Rather they had to complete their task in as natural a manner as possible. One such errand was to go to a drug store and buy Kleenex and a cold remedy for an imaginary sick friend. (One of the instructors had agreed to reimburse the shoppers to the extent of $2 and to find a use for the purchases.) Mr. Hazama reported:

> Suzuki [No. 3] asked the man behind the counter to give him a packet of medicine for a cold, adding that a friend of his had caught cold and was in bed. The man led us to the stand where various kinds of medicine were displayed. He asked Suzuki about the condition of his friend. At this inquiry Suzuki was a little bewildered, but he contrived to answer that his friend had a sore throat.

American barbers

Even greater ingenuity was required of Mr. Sano, who was to interview a local barber about his business. He and Mr. Takanami went into a shop, expecting to engage the barber in conversation while having their hair cut. They were relieved to find no other customers in the shop, but relief changed to unease when the barber remained expressionless as he cut their hair. Suddenly inspiration came.

> After each of us had a haircut, Sano immediately said, "We have become much more handsome than before." Then the barber smiled. Sano continued to say, "In fact, I have a barber friend in Japan, and he asked me to ask about American barbers." The barber said, "With pleasure," as his reply.

He answered their questions about how one becomes a barber and how long he had been one. However, he demurred when asked about his volume of business, saying only that many Rutgers students have their hair cut in his shop. "We were dodged cleverly," Mr. Takanami admitted. He also noted that, while they had heard of the high price of manual labor in the States, they were amazed to pay $2.50 for a 15-minute haircut. For considerably less than that in Japan, Takanami remarked, a man could have the "full course" of shampoo, haircut, shave, and massage. (A haircut alone would cost the equivalent of two cups of coffee.) Discovering the prices and availability of basic services was a useful aspect of the errands, for it gave the Japanese teachers an idea of what their American counterparts' seemingly astronom-

ical salaries mean in purchasing power.

No American-made souvenirs

A related feature was introducing our Japanese visitors to the kinds of goods that can be purchased here, and letting them see the ubiquity of Japanese-made goods. Mr. Haruta and Mr. Kanaya were asked to find souvenirs to take back to Japan. They first tried the gift section of a department store, but saw nothing that isn't also available in Japan—except for a $12 coin collection, too expensive an item for their purpose. A policeman who had shown them the way to the store had also pointed out Woolworth's, which they decided to try next.

> In this store we found many Japanese-made articles which are all a little more expensive than in the stores of Japan. We again asked the clerks whether they had typical articles of America. They all hesitated and one of them said, "What about hot dogs?" with laughter. One clerk recommended to us American flags and America's oldest model cars. But to our regret, they were also what we might find even in Japan.

The Woolworth's clerk suggested a nearby hardware store, where they found "seal collection—New Jersey, patriotic, Civil War—for 25 cents each." Mr. Haruta's conclusion was perceptive: "On our errand we recognized that America is too young a country for us to find her typical articles without difficulties."

Finding a store

The conversations involved in locating an appropriate store proved to be a bonus in a number of the errands and suggest that the instructions need not be too explicit. In fact one of the most successful errand assignments of the Fordham University JTP[3] was for two of the women to buy iron-on seam binding. Having no idea of what that item might be, the women tried various local stores and were finally referred to the neighborhood sewing machine dealer. However, no one realized that in asking for "an iron-on seam binding," the women didn't know what they were looking for; so when the Singer clerk said that they didn't carry seam binding, Miss Habu and Miss Taguchi were stumped. Imagine their triumphal delight when, stopping in a local drugstore for a Coke one evening after an excursion to Manhattan,

they found seam tape in a notions rack. They marveled at the American need for such an item, and each bought several packages as souvenirs for their friends at home!

Even when the site for performing the errand is specified clearly, the participants may have a certain amount of adventure in finding it. A visit to the Rutgers Agricultural Experiment Station, for example, required asking directions of several people and riding on the campus bus. (The errand was to find out the average annual rainfall in New Brunswick; the research data confirmed our suspicions that we were in the midst of an exceptionally wet year.)

At the police station

However, perhaps the most exciting errand, in terms of tracking down information, was the seemingly prosaic assignment of inquiring at the local police station about regulations for keeping dogs as pets. Mr. Suzuki [No. 2] questioned four people before he and Mr. Nagashima located the police station. Once there, they chanced on a policeman who had been stationed in Japan after World War II. He spent a long time answering their questions and wrote out "veterinarian" for Mr. Nagashima, who was understandably troubled by the spelling. Then the policeman suggested that they might also want to visit the SPCA—and arranged for his Japanese visitors to be taken there in a patrol car. It was the talk of the program for days.

The "dog" errand was suggested by the number of dogs running loose in New Brunswick and by a suspicion that the American preoccupation with pets would seem strange to a Japanese. Quite a different use of the police station was made by Drs. Allen and Knapp in the Temple University JTP: they sent a team to find out how many crimes had been committed since the Japanese teachers' arrival.

Unexpected bonus

One Rutgers errand grew out of a genuine need, which suggests another source of errand ideas. Mrs. Kagiya lost the crown of her watch and asked the program director where she could have it replaced. Seizing the opportunity, he changed her errand assign-

ment to one similar to the engagement ring errand—to find the cheapest and most expensive watches at a jewelry store and to find out what determined the cost. Mrs. Kagiya and Miss Kaji went to a local jeweler (not the one with the rings) and asked about having the watch repaired. A three-day wait and a $3 charge, they were told. When they inquired about new watches, they were turned over to another clerk. After he had shown the women many watches and discussed the differences in price and quality, Mrs. Kagiya explained the assignment behind her questions. The salesman, like the policeman, had been in Japan. He surely had pleasant memories of Japanese hospitality, for he arranged to have Mrs. Kagiya's watch fixed on the spot and for a dollar less than the original quotation. He is undoubtedly still receiving Christmas cards from his two customers.

Not all errands were equally productive, of course. Assignments to find the admission requirements for Rutgers and postage rates to Japan may have occasioned pleasant meetings but resulted in brief and dull reports. The least successful errand of all, through no fault of the team, was that performed by Mr. Sakai and Mr. Shimokawa. Here is their report, in its entirety:

> After lessons were over, both of us went straight to the railroad station. At the station three clerks seemed to be very busy. So we had to wait for a couple of minutes, and then Shimokawa asked one of them the first question, "How often does the train go to New York?" The clerk didn't answer the question but handed him a copy of a timetable, and to the next questions, "Is the seat reserved or not?" and "Where is the New York Station?" he just answered, "Not. 33rd Street and 8th Avenue." That's all.

Clearly, these were poorly conceived errands. The assigned questions had simple, straightforward answers which offered no opening for conversation. And there was little possibility for imaginative treatment of the topic. A successful errand assignment need not be complex, but it should have an open-ended solution.

Cooperation from townspeople

The courtesy of the New Brunswick townspeople in responding to questions that may have struck them as bizarre was gratifying—and perhaps unusual. JTP program directors who

used the errand assignment in the summer of 1970 felt it prudent to inform the local merchants about the overall program before the arrival of the Japanese. The Temple program also introduced the idea of two errand assignments, so that each participant could have a turn as questioner and as reporter. Since a week is sufficient for the completion of an errand, it is certainly possible to do two in a four-week program. For both the Rutgers and Fordham JTPs, the errand reports were duplicated for distribution to all the participants at the end of the four-week session.

What accounts for the success of the errands? First, the assignment is sufficiently structured that students in the intermediate range of language proficiency can succeed. Second, the errands, if cleverly devised, provide an opportunity for independent discovery of some aspect of the host culture. Third, the errands provide an opportunity for meaningful use of language outside the classroom—the ultimate aim of any language program. Finally, as the participants' reports demonstrate, the errands are fun for everyone involved.

Notes

1. Dr. Allen wrote in a subsequent *IDIOM*, ". . . Professor Donald Knapp should be credited for a larger role in the development of the concept. I believe he was responsible for coining the term *errands* in connection with the activity and he was the one who devised the detailed list of errands for our Japanese Teacher Program at Temple University."
2. The quotations included in this paper are drawn from these "Reports of Errand Activities by Japanese Teachers of English, Rutgers University, Summer '69."
3. Summer 1970. The team was the same as for the Rutgers Program: Gary Gabriel, Pamela Breyer, Gloria Gallingane, and myself.

JEAN McCONOCHIE, associate professor of English, Pace University, has taught in intensive summer programs at Teachers College, Columbia University and at Columbia, Fordham, Harvard, and Rutgers Universities as well as in Poland and Yugoslavia. She is the editor of *Twentieth Century American Short Stories* (Collier Macmillan International) and co-author, with Alice H. Osman, of *If You Feel Like Singing* (Longman Inc.).

(From *IDIOM* 10:4, October 1980)